

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5806

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 10488

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR EG LE SY

SUBJECT: EGYPT VERSUS SYRIA IN LEBANON

1. GOE POLICY FOR UNDERCUTTING SYRIAN GAINS IN LEBANON IS
SIMPLY STATED: PLO-JUMBLATT FORCES MUST BE STRENGTHENED TO
POINT WHERE THEY CAN AT LEAST FIGHT SARG-MARONITES TO A STANDSTILL.
EXHAUSTED BY WAR OF ATTRITION, SARG WILL ULTIMATELY HAVE TO
AGREE TO TRUCE UNDER ARAB LEAGUE AUSPICES WITHOUT GAINING
PREDOMINANCE OVER LEBANON AND PALESTINIANS. LEBANESE WOULD THEN
SIT DOWN ALONE, CHAIRED BY SARKIS, TO REVISE NATIONAL PACT
AND SUBSEQUENTLY WORK OUT REVISED MODUS VIVENDI WITH PALESTINIANS.

2. THIS GOE SCENARIO DEPENDS ON TWO KEY FACTORS: CONTINUING
PLO DETERMINATION FIGHT ON AND FLOW OF SUPPLIES SUFFICIENT TO
REDUCE SARG'S CURRENT MILITARY ADVANTAGE ON THE GROUND. ON
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LATTER POINT, GOE IS DOING ITS BEST TO HELP, PROVIDING

TRANSSHIPMENT FACILITIES FOR DELIVERIES TO SIDON AND TYRE. SOVIETS, IRAQIS AND (IRONICALLY) LIBYANS ARE ALL APPARENTLY PROVIDING MATERIEL ASSISTANCE. NEW ELEMENT CREATED BY DAMASCUS AGREEMENT IS RENEWED GOE SUSPICION THAT AT LEAST SOME ELEMENTS OF FATAH LEADERSHIP, WITH BACKS TO SEA, MAY BE LOSING THEIR NERVE.

3. EGYPTIANS MUST NOW MAKE POLICY ASSESSMENT -- DOES FATAH REGARD QADDUMI'S PILGRIMAGE TO DAMASCUS AS ITS CANOSSA, OR IS ARAFAT SEEKING TACTICAL LULL, BUYING TIME WITH INTENTION OF FIGHTING ON WHEN MAJOR NEW ARMS AND SUPPLY DELIVERIES COMPLETED. IF GOE CONCLUDES ARAFAT HAS MERELY SOUGHT BREATHING SPACE, THEN EGYPTIANS WILL DO THEIR PART AND CONTINUE SEEK SPEED RESUPPLY EFFORTS.

4. IF, ON OTHER HAND, GOE CONES TO CONCLUSION THAT FATAH LEADERS HAVE ALREADY CAPITULATED, THEN ISSUE OF SINAI II COMES AGAIN INTO SHARP FOCUS. IN EGYPTIAN VIEW, SYRIANS WILL HAVE IMPOSED ON PLO THEIR CONTENTION THAT SINAI II GENERATED LEBANESE TRAGEDY, AND WILL PEDDLE THIS WITH ENHANCED EFFECTS TO OTHER ARABS. FURTHER, SYRIANS WILL BE WELL ON THEIR WAY TO ESTABLISHING THE CONSOLIDATED NORTHERN FRONT WHICH EGYPT HAS WORKED SO HARD TO SABOTAGE. EGYPTIANS ARE AWARE THAT, DESPITE ARAFAT'S DISCLAIMER OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR INCLUSION SINAI II IN PLO/SARG COMMUNIQUE, PLO ALSO DISLIKES SINAI II.

5. WHAEVER GOE FINALLY CONCLUDES ABOUT FATAH'S STOMACH FOR MORE FIGHTING, CAIRO WILL KEEP WEATHER EYE COCKED IN DIRECTION OF RIYADH. SAUDI REACTION TO ANY SYRIAN/PLO ACCOMODATION WILL BE CRUCIAL FACTOR IN GOE POLICY PLANNING. (WE NOTE IN THIS CONNECTION APPARENT RESURRECTION OF KHALID AL-HASAN IN HIS TRADITIONAL ROLE AS FATAH LINK WITH SAG.) GOE WILL ALSO KEEP UNDER URGENT AND CONTINUOUS REVIEW ANY STIRRINGS OF SAG REACTION TO GOE'S OWN TACTICAL SHIFTS ON SARG/PLO ISSUE.

6. EGYPTIAN DILEMNA HAS SIGNIFICANT FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR US. GOE FIRMLY BELIEVES WE SHARE GENERAL SYRIAN PREMISES ON LEBANON, I.E., THAT PLO CAN BE DISCIPLINED BY SARG AND THAT DAMASCUS-DOMINATED NORTHERN FRONT COULD OFFER CONFIDENTIAL

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WAY OUT OF PRESENT PEACE SETTLEMENT STALEMATE. EGYPTIANS ARE CONVINCED OF FALLACY OF THIS ALLEGED US REASONING AND HOPE USG WILL EVENTUALLY ALTER ITS PRESUMED ESTIMATE. UNTIL PALESTINIANS-LEFTISTS CAN BE STRENGTHENED, HOWEVER, GOE REALIZES IT IS UNLIKELY THEY WILL BE ABLE SHAKE USG CONVICTION THAT SARG HAS THE RIGHT IDEA. WHILE WE ARE NOT AWARE THAT EITHER SADAT OR FAHMY HAVE DELIBERATELY SOUGHT TO CONCEAL FROM US THEIR EFFORTS ASSIST PLO MILITARILY, THERE IS A DISTINCT

DROP IN THE DEGREE OF FRANKNESS WITH WHICH SUCH SUBJECTS ARE
NOW DISCUSSED WITH US--THEY ARE NO LONGER VOLUNTEERED. THERE IS,
IN SHORT, A CONVICTION THAT WE CANNOT BE COUNTED UPON TO WORK
WITH GOE FOR THE TYPE OF LEBANESE SETTLEMENT IT WOULD LIKE
TO SEE EMERGE.
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